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Robert Siegler

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ROBERT SIEGLER

Masquage

An Extrapolation of Eisenstein's Theory of Montage-as-Conflict to the Multi-Image Film

Once upon a time, a film was something that was projected upon a single screen before an audience seated on fixed seats. But in recent years the old assumptions have been called increasingly into question. In 1958 the Czechs sent to the Brussels Exhibition their Poly-Ecran system—images were simultaneously projected on many separate screens, scattered about the auditorium, from a series of projectors. At the New York World's Fair, the audience for one film show found themselves seated in a monstrous elevator, which took them into a simulated rocket to witness a film of their "flight." Francis Thompson and Alexander Hammid, in To Be Alive!, showed the potentialities of the triptych screen. In Expo '67 at Montreal, the many film exhibitions included several experiments with novel forms: in Labyrinth the audience walked from room to room, and was confronted with a wall-screen/floor-screen combination and a multiple-screen film in the shape of a cross [see FQ, Fall, 1967]; in the Canada Pavilion the audience area rotated during the presentation; and in the Ontario Pavilion a 70mm projector threw onto a single very large screen a multiple-image film, the basis for the following article, whose individual images could move, grow, shrink, change shape, within a complex system of moving masks.

In his article "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram"* Eisenstein gives cogent reasons for accepting the principle of montage-as-collision, rather than -as-linkage; and he goes on to assert that the montage principle applies both to film sequences and to their components,

montage cells or individual shots. A *Place to Stand*, the film shown in the Ontario Pavilion at Expo '67, with its multiple images on a single screen, suggests that Eisenstein's montage principles may be applied on another filmic level: that of the mask.

The mask is the surrounding, delimiting area about the picture or illuminated area. In filmmaker's language, the mask is the area outside the frame-line. Eisenstein's films, like virtually all films to date, used one mask: that which surrounded the screen, separating it from the darkened theater. Certain types of iris effects

* *Film Form* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949; Meridian Books paperback, 1957), pp. 37–40. Compact expressions of Eisenstein's montage theory may also be found in "A Dialectic Approach to Film Forms" and "Methods of Montage," in the same volume.

and isolated (hence disturbing) constrictions of active viewing area were used by Griffith and other early film-makers. But the viewing area otherwise remained constant save for experiments in enlarging screen size (in the finales of spectacles such as *Hell's Angels* and *Samson and Delilah*), experiments in different screen ratios, and Gance's multiple-screen *Napoleon*. The multiple-mask film of the Ontario Pavilion alone and first brings systematically into play what I here propose to call the principle of *masquage*.

There is, first of all, a certain semantic confusion in the indeterminate use of the terms *screen* (or viewing area) as opposed to *image*. A given image may or may not occupy the entire screen. By saying that the screen is multiply divided, or using the term multi-image film, I mean that the multiple division has been achieved in the film laboratory, *on the film itself*, rather than by employing multiple projectors, as in the multi-screen film. We assume the technical means to have been achieved; our concern is with the result. Some practical application and procedures will be pointed out later.

Eisenstein's motive for comparing the montage cell to a molecule is two-fold: to prove the montage principle on both a simple and a complex level and to provide a scientific analogy (and thus order) for the new art of the film. If the individual shot is analogous to a molecule of a substance, then the total montage can be seen as a complex substance—a higher combination of these molecules.

With the assimilation of the multiple-image screen and the birth of the *masquage* principle, Eisenstein's analogy will have to be altered: the montage cell is to be seen as the atom, the basic structure, while it is the mask, through *masquage*, that is the molecular form, the intermediary structure between the montage cell and the montage complex.

Eisenstein strongly demarcates his version of montage from Pudovkin's: conflict, as opposed to linkage. Montage-as-conflict implies a dynamic medium, one capable of plastic change, in which the parts equal the whole: the rising

of the lions, in *Potemkin*, depends as much on the fast cutting, on the implication of movement, as on the juxtaposition of sharply *contrasted* forms. Montage-as-linkage presumes a structure of events *greater* than its filmic parts: the usual montage sequence in which someone is run down by a car, quoted by Pudovkin himself, is typical, with its fast cutting between busy street, feet crossing the street, car wheels, car approaching the camera head-on, etc. None of the component parts are self-sustaining, but are linked together and cut with a certain tempo so as to gain an artificial form or a shape, both filmically and emotionally. It is this element of the architectonic arising from montage-as-linkage that implies also a rigidity. Montage-as-collision implies fluidity of componential structures, in terms of a counterpoint, a music: the famous mounting of Kerensky up the stairs and the inter-cutting with the peacock and the statues, by multiple juxtapositions *within* a sequence, give a certain inner form to that part of the sequence. If montage-as-collision cells may be seen as analogous to a contrapuntal melody, the total montage becomes the musical structure (fugue, *passacaglia*, *ricercare*); and *masquage* becomes the instrumental timbre or timbres chosen to play the melody, *to articulate the form*. Just as instrumental technique pertains to a process of articulating music (melody), so can *masquage* articulate the montage cell.

Linkage bricks and elements denote rigidity and subservience to a whole, a commune greater than its parts—a solidified structure dependent on architectural rigidity. (I say this only from a theoretical point of view; Pudovkin's films are anything but rigid and some of Eisenstein's certainly are!) Montage-as-collision cells, atoms, molecules denote living matter and inner movement of parts (the Odessa Steps sequence is comprised of inner movements and groupings each quite independent, yet not anarchistic to the total shape or form.) Montage forms are non-fixed, though the art-form necessarily dictates limitations; even with the limitation of the fixed, single-mask screen there is a certain allowed chaos that is possible (the dis-

parate montage cells); and there are recognizable forms, but leading to unknown, mysterious shapes (the gathering of the Odessa populace, the ships on the water, the sense of tension, impending action, and the over-all emotional tone of this sequence).

. . . montage is conflict.

Conflict within the shot is potential montage, in the development of its intensity shattering the quadrilateral cage of the shot and exploding its conflict into montage impulses between the montage pieces.

To regard the frame as a particular, as it were, molecular case of montage, makes possible the direct application of montage practice to the theory of the shot.

—S. M. EISENSTEIN

All this is now complicated by the multiple-image screen; all that pertained to the montage elements and cells, now applies to the mask through the *masquage* principle.

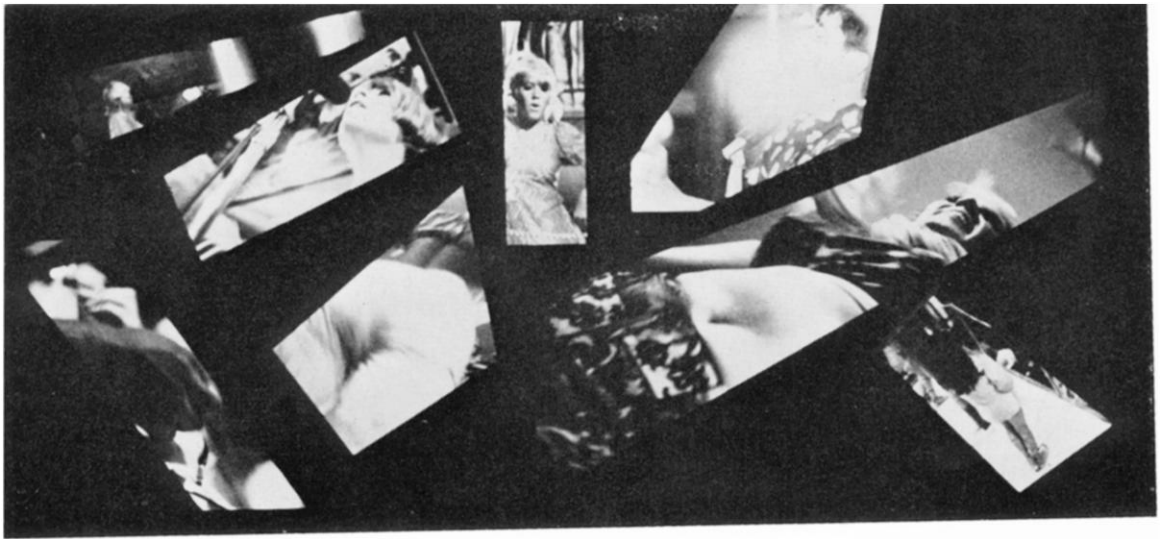
Masquage depends on the conflict between the darkened viewing area, the total screen area, and the illuminated image area(s). The masked section may be thought to be analogous to the montage cell. Everything that Eisenstein postulated about the montage cell, the shot, may now apply to the handling of the mask. This application may be to the single mask of a single, undivided screen; to the multiple masks of multiple-image screen; or to the various masks of a multiple-screen film. Eisenstein's theories would apply to an individual mask or to a complex use of many masks over one or more screen areas.

Masks may be varied in shape, size, or content. Masks may or may not remain fixed in position or size: they may move across the screen, carrying with them a primary image. An example of this occurs in the Ontario Pavilion film: a full-screen shot of a single image, that of a motor boat crossing a wilderness lake, is

cropped down so that the mask is close around the boat and moves with the boat across the blackened screen area, the masked area comprising about 1/10 of the original and immensely more effective for its condensation of the original, and also because of the focal conflict between the illuminated and the darkened screen areas.

Masks may move, even when there is no movement implied in the image, as demonstrated in the same film: in another sequence, along with various other shots of wooded areas, there is a real pan in one mask-area, which is artificially continued by having the masked area then move away from two other adjacent masks (which fade out). The remaining areas then serves as a connecting device to the following sequence. Ideally, in the midst of an emotional scene, one could have a large, centered, square mask, containing the scene of the action, break down into component masks (varying in size, shape, ratio, etc.) and move apart or literally fly apart; they could either continue off the screen, or fade out, or come to rest at various positions on the screen—a heightening of the fragmentation of the emotional moment. The reverse process could be used in a scene of coherence, discovery, etc. The conflict of the mask area with the darkened screen is heightened by the physical shift of the mask from one viewing area to another, this shift being similar to instrumental shifts in a symphony orchestra, as from double basses in the rear to a single violin in the foreground. Visual-physical phenomena occur which may be related to the *phi* phenomenon and our visual thresholds. Possible, then, are the jump-mask, dissolve-mask, etc.—an image may vanish from one position but simultaneously reappear in another, or fade out in one position as it reappears elsewhere. All the devices presently utilized to vary the montage cell may now relate to masks, as well as all those devices obtained by optical printing.

Moreover, all the montage conflicts Eisenstein formulated are applicable (conflicts of scales, volumes, masses, depths, directions, lights, duration) by a plastic use of the mask: conflict of mask shapes and sizes, mask ratios or



Fractured dance-hall images from A PLACE TO STAND. (Camera: J. Seckeresh and Les George. Director: Dave MacKay.)

proportions, mask geometries, symmetries of mask placements. Beyond this is the possibility of animating the mask, the continual changing of mask dimensions and shape, and the movement of these masks from place to place; possible are polymorphous masks, their animation and manipulation, moving in non-geometrical, asymmetrical relationships. Finally, the mask may seem to dissolve, whether through a regular or a non-regular edge-of-image, in the manner of a static collage. This highest form would assimilate both masquage and montage principles, in all their applications, to produce a constantly changing picture-edge without simple defining masks—a film of the highest visual threshold, for some future audience.

To illustrate, let us take *Marienbad*, that most non-linear of the pre-masquage films (for, as the reader has no doubt already guessed: the masquage principle is one of simultaneity and non-linearity, and the multiple-image screen is a mosaic). Resnais, in certain scenes of remembrance, included a hierarchy of continually added detail (the moulding of Seyrig's bedroom, the furnishings, the light, her dress, etc.) Utilizing masquage principles, he could have started with a primary image—of the man, before the memory—occupying the full screen. The first memory, being hazy, amorphous, could occur while the prime viewing area, central-

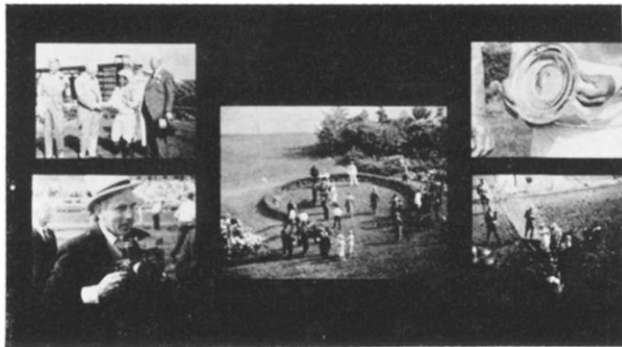
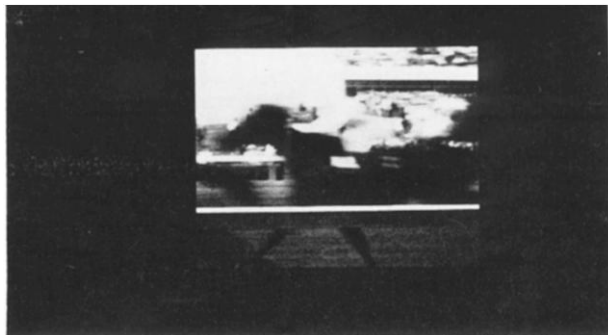
ized on the screen, began to shrink, cropping down to the man's face; in the upper, left corner would begin an amorphous fade-in mask, free-form, somewhat globular, containing the long shot of the near-empty room, never fading in clearly, then fading out—while at the lower right corner, the same shot, but enlarged, faded in, moving from off-screen onto it and fading out as it came into conflict with the prime viewing area, which then grew back to its original size. As the memories became more and more complex, more and more structured, the central viewing area's mask would grow smaller and smaller, the satellite masks more definite in structure (square, rectangle, either vertical or horizontal, pyramidal, etc.)—more geometric. Images would vary, within the masks: close-ups of the moulding in the bedroom; medium close-ups of Seyrig on her bed; the shots might include multiplications of the same shot, reproduced in the same geometric form (as was done in *Grand Prix*), perhaps in a cluster in one specific area. In contrast, a rather CinemaScope-like mask could lie across the bottom of the viewing area, including those encompassing views of the room which that proportion captures so well. By having *all* the images of the same geometric proportions, especially noncircular forms, a sense of harsh order could be implied; in contrast, having a conglomerate of

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non-repeated shapes and sizes during this mnemonic process, fading in and out, moving in random about the screen, could magnify the variety of the stream of memory. Resnais's flash shots of Seyrig on the bed could be replaced by a jump-mask: the prime image centered on the screen, suddenly blacking out and the woman's image, in some *necessarily contrasting* mask proportion or geometry, appearing in a different physical area, and then the original image returning, in reverse—a direct cut between two physical locations. The physical motion of looking away from the expected area of viewing, the possibility that any segment of the total screen, whether momentarily black, illumined with an image, or even blank, white, might become a working area, and the possibility that any part of the whole might become important, are aspects of masquage which relate it to montage and demonstrate the elements of linkage and collision within masquage.

The animated mask, the continually changing border, is utilized in a primitive manner in the Ontario Pavilion film, in an extremely wide-angle, medium shot of horses, which come down a race track past the centrally stationed camera, and on past. The mask is tightly cropped down on the horses, neglecting the surroundings; it moves from right to left with the race, but as the horses reach the center, they grow larger and less distorted (due to the wide-angle lens). The mask approaches with them, also growing larger, until it reaches dead center, when it continues panning, but grows smaller. The effect is not unlike the circularly distorted mask which Griffith used in some of the Babylon sequences in *Intolerance*: a peculiar focusing, imposed on the audience's perception.

This element of focus peculiar to masquage should be contrasted with the visual limitations of the CinemaScope-Cinerama screen areas: since the latter are constant in their masks, subtle or effective manipulations cannot occur without unnerving disparities occurring (gigantic close-ups, the chopping-off of heads and feet, etc.) or without having to show a continual stream of master scenes, infrequently altered with meaningful close-ups. Masquage opens up



A PLACE TO STAND. Top: Mask moves across screen at same rate as camera pans. Middle: Camera pans but mask stays still. Bottom: Expansion into multiple image. (Camera: Les George. Director: Dave MacKay.)

completely the possibility of any film ratio being utilized, any subdivision of the screen being pertinent—changes between subdivisions, screen ratios, and proportions are obtainable, according to the subject-matter and the emotional tone. The epic quality of the larger screens can now be subdivided, by masquage, for intimate close-ups, personal scenes, scenes of a more

complex nature: imagine the confusion of a battle scene, shown by simultaneously changing masks, each individually cut but all interrelated. (The complexities of sound for such films are too vast for this tentative discussion.)

The film-collage would be the ideal means by which Joyce's work could be translated to the screen. The high perceptual complexity of the film collage would make it, at first, an experimental form, perhaps a gimmick; but though the Ontario Pavilion film is also a kind of gimmick (a rather simple-minded bit of travelogue-propaganda of a distinctly scenic province) it should be taken for what it is: a prediction of future film form and technique, a *Great Train Robbery* of the school of masquage.

Masquage and the manipulation of the mask are visual technical tools, as is the cropping of still photographs. For film, masquage will become a tool for implementing style, form, and content.

Screen ratios and proportions have an inherent emotional content by their size and shape; early experiments in varying screen shapes now have renewed validity after years of neglect. The film-maker, wisely using masquage, must judge for himself which combination or combinations to use within the film structure, without overloading his subject-matter (no huge skin-pores in CinemaScope and no cramping of multitudinous details into a small viewing area—and yet . . .)

In argument with those claiming masquage to be an artificial, confusing technique, it should be pointed out that man's threshold of perception and consciousness is continuously changing rather than constant. One daydreams while walking, is suddenly brought awake by a pretty girl passing, bumps into a friend and begins an argument, while in reverse order, the memories of the girl and of the daydream diminish, continue on another level, etc. Our thresholds of perception and our areas of focus—not only those of the visual sense, but of the other senses, and those of time and space continuities—continually change, increasing, decreasing, inter-combining. Even more complicated are

those combinations of conscious, subconscious, imagination, perception, and creation. Thus the element of change inherent in masquage holds an overwhelming artistic and technical potential for the art of the film.

The most obvious practical advantage to the masquage film is that only one camera will be needed, and only one projector and screen for the viewing of the film. The masquage film will be, at first, quite expensive due to the necessity of special optical printing and effects. But, such films theoretically could be shown in 16mm. There is no reason why simple masquage couldn't be adapted for making 16mm or even 8mm films. The masking would not always have to be done by optical printing: one could construct interchangeable fixed masks to fit into cameras and shoot through these. Given reflex lenses, the ability of good 8mm cameras to back-wind, fade in or out, and to dissolve, there is no reason why the technique could not be applicable. Moving masks could be shot with a zoom lens or on an animation stand, and used in A & B-roll sandwich printing. The most important element in such primitive applications would be to keep aware of the exact physical placement of the mask-openings, unless overlay of images were desired. The use of deliberate overlay, multiple images, color mask-edges, filters, I leave to the reader's imagination.

When the home-movie camera is replaced by a miniaturized and simplified video-tape camera, capable of recording both image and sound onto micro-sound/image tape and of storing magnetic impulses not only on surface layers, but in molecular depth, a set of sophisticated masks will be available and special grid lines, worked on the reflex viewplate and on the masks, will coordinate the image.

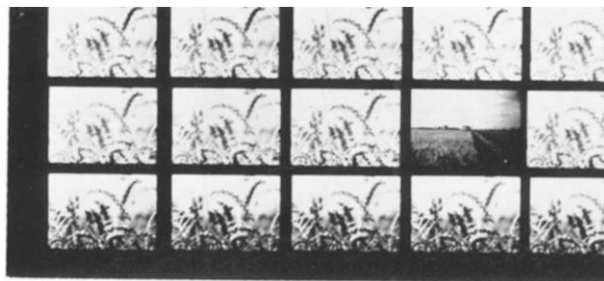
Those who criticize masquage as calling for superhuman creative and imaginative powers, due to its complexity ("Just how do you know where each image should go and what to do with it") can be answered by this speculation: the story board, the camera viewfinder, and the work-print will all contain a standard series of grid lines. Juxtaposition of the film with the

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story board—perhaps direct projection onto the story board—will make editing physically much easier. Perhaps these grid lines could be similar to the latent edge-numbers now used to coordinate film editing. The effect might be compared to the blocking-out of action for a stage presentation. Once again, film combines the aesthetic-imaginative with the distinctly physical, but this enigma of what is and what isn't reaches back as far as the history of films.

There has been no complex and satisfying use of masquage to date. In no way can masquage substitute for content; like montage, masquage can be used to make a shallow film flashy and like montage, the technique can destroy film style and content by over-use.

Ideally, montage (both linkage and conflict) and masquage are to be used in combination,



A PLACE TO STAND. *Repeated identical images, with a zoom-through of one image.*
(Camera: Barry Gordon.)

in a sensible and restrained manner. With the higher thresholds (visual awareness, color response, sound textures, etc.) called for by new film-makers, and with the multiple-screen and masquage film, audience response will become more complex, more highly structured, potentially more sensitive. In turn, the complexity of the medium will demand of the film-maker an integrity of content and technique, on a more complex level of visual sensibility.

FORREST WILLIAMS

Fellini's Voices

For all the reviews of *Giulietta degli Spiriti*, Federico Fellini's film has not been singled out for its special contribution to the practical issue of the relations between screen and soundtrack, or more exactly, between screen and dialogue. Ever since the soundtrack threatened to turn most cinema productions into what Eisenstein in 1928 called "talking pictures," and then for the most part went on to fulfill his unhappy foreboding, critical opinion has been largely in agreement, from the "visual-above-all" school of Rudolf Arnheim's *Film As Art* to the "impurist" school of the late André Bazin, that dialogue introduces special problems requiring conscious resolution for any film seeking artistic unity. The most persistent trap consists in the mere recording of verbal exchanges on the

soundtrack while the camera either waits on the speakers like a footman, or else breaks up the monotony of such a vigil with arbitrary angles, movements, and cuts. The discussion in the garden between the king and Thomas More in *A Man For All Seasons* is a recent example by an accomplished director of a bit of both of these prosaic makeshifts. Moreover, the difficulty of integration may compound rapidly because dialogue readily introduces or emphasizes subjects that the camera cannot get much purchase on, such as complicated conceptual processes and the intricate dialectic of wills, one of which is more satisfactorily developed on the pages of the novel, the other on the stage. The narrative and dramatic issues thus generated tend to require even more dialogue